

# Ask Joe

By Arden Miller, CZM

*Often referred to within the Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management (CZM) as the “institutional memory” of the agency, Joe Pelczarski is the recipient of a wide array of questions and requests. During the 21 years he’s worked at CZM, he has served on committees responsible for a wide range of issues. Between the phone and various committee roles, he has seen and heard it all. Here he shares some of the more unusual situations and questions that have come up over the years...*

## ***What is the most unusual thing you’ve ever had to do for your job?***

Other than answering random questions on the phone?! Well, the three-week trip I took to the Grand Banks and Flemish Cap in 1982 would rank up there. I was an observer on a swordfish boat that went into waters beyond our (CZM) jurisdiction and a memo I wrote during the trip ended up being excerpted in Sebastian Unger’s *The Perfect Storm*. Another “not your normal work day” experience I had was being filmed as a clam digger for a public service announcement in the early ‘90s. I spent the whole day digging up clams. They used the footage, but I don’t think it got much air time because it was competing with an announcement the New England Aquarium did on whales, which was a little more exciting than me digging clams...

## ***What stands out as something you were asked to do that had nothing to do with what you were hired to do?***

The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency asked me to mediate between the Highway Department and the Natural Heritage Program to figure out an appropriate water level for a dam. The issue was that the dam was holding too

much water back and the water flooded the roads, creating dangerous driving situations. Releasing too much water would place endangered turtles that were hibernating at risk by being exposed to freezing temperatures. My role pretty much came down to me saying to both parties: “Pick a water level here that you can both live with and let’s move on!”

## ***What’s the oddest question you’ve ever been asked?***

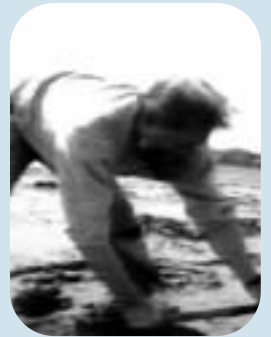
A reporter from out-of-state—somewhere in the midwest, I think—called during a storm to ask me to confirm that Cape Cod was sinking into the sea. I told the reporter that all was well and that any reports of Cape Cod’s sinking were greatly exaggerated. (I did, of course, explain about sea level rise.)

## ***And what’s the strangest project to come up for review by CZM?***

Well, in the early ‘80s an interesting proposal came into CZM for Project Review. (Editor’s note: projects that need federal permits are reviewed by the CZM office for their consistency with state environmental policies.) This gentleman wanted to build a platform 20 miles from Boston called Gugels Island. His idea was to provide citizens with the pleasures of life that are not legal on-shore: a gambling casino, a brothel, off-shore banking, et cetera. He wanted us to sign off on this project that would create this big time floating party that would be visited by boaters and cruise ships. Maybe he was ahead of his time, but we didn’t sign off on that.

## ***Last question: what’s the funniest thing you’ve ever been asked?***

To do the ‘Ask Joe’ column!



*Joe as he appeared in a public service announcement on the importance of clean shellfish beds.*